

Turtle stranding educates Hickam



Photo by Angela Elbern
Cody Hooven and Richard Herren, Biological Research Technicians from the Marine Turtle Research at the National Marine Fisheries Service, pull a stranded Green Sea Turtle from the water near Kam Housing Dec. 28.

By Tech. Sgt.
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15th Airlift Wing Public Affairs

Two local youths and their mom tried to help save a stranded sea turtle off a sand bar near Kamehameha housing Dec. 28.

Rachel Sands and Kady Walker, both 11, were out strolling along the water when they saw something looking back at them.

"We saw his head looking around as we approached," said Kady, who lives on Pearl Harbor. The girls noticed something was wrong with the turtle. "I saw a growth on his eyes," said Kady. That is when the girls went into action.

"I got on my cell phone and called my mom," said Rachel, who lives in Kam Housing and is the daughter of Tech. Sgt. Jason Sands, 56th Information Warfare Flight.

According to Rachel, her mom, Karen Sands, called the humane society and got the phone number for the National Marine Fisheries Service in Honolulu. While Mrs. Sands contacted people to report the turtle, Rachel and Kady stood guard and kept a close eye on the 90-pound Green Sea Turtle, which is listed as a threatened species under the U.S. Endangered Species Act.

"I'm very proud of how Rachel and Kady quickly called me for help and watched over the turtle to give it a better chance to survive," said Mrs. Sands. Unfortunately, not all stories have a happy ending. The turtle had to be euthanized said Cody Hooven, Biological Research Technician, Marine Turtle Research

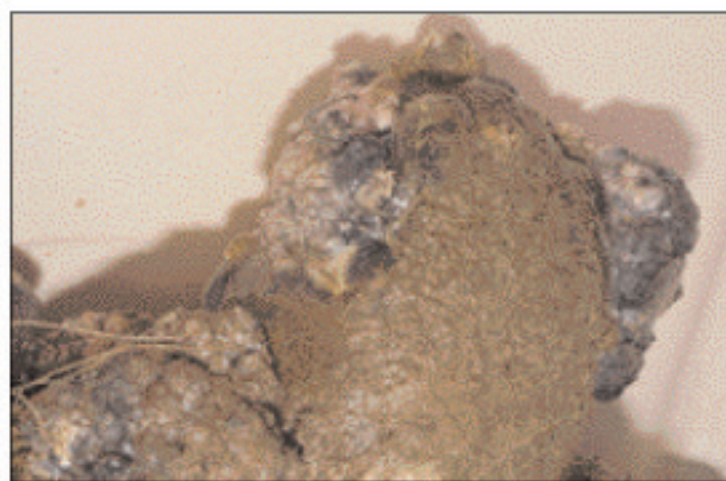


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The sea turtle had large tumors on each eye. Making it completely blind in one and nearly no vision in other.

at the National Marine Fisheries Service.

"After a veterinarian examined the turtle, it was determined to be beyond medical treatment," Ms. Hooven said. The technician said in addition

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Biological Research
Technician

to the external tumors, it had almost no vision in the left eye, was blind in the right eye (due to tumors), was anemic, had poor body condition (little body fat, emaciated), and also had a small tumor on the right lung.

"This turtle

was previously tagged by our program in October 2002 in Kaneohe Bay," Ms. Hooven said. "Not only did the severity of its tumor affliction increase, but the animal had hardly grown [0.1cm]." Average growth according to Ms. Hooven is 2 to 2.5 cm per year.

"This was an unfortunate case, but was definitely in a state where the turtle was suffering and received the only humane treatment," she said. According to the fisheries service data, on average 265 turtles are stranded each year

around Hawaii, and Hickam accounts for about three a year.

"Sea turtles most often strand, or beach themselves when they are sick or injured and need to rest safely out of the water away from predators and other obstacles," she said. "Occasionally, healthy green turtles in Hawaii will also come ashore to sleep and bask in the sun and just need to be left undisturbed. This can be seen on the North Shore of Oahu at Laniakea Beach."

The two girls may not have saved this turtle, but Ms. Hooven and Richard Herren, who responded to the stranded turtle, praised the efforts of the girls.

"They did a beautiful job," said Ms. Hooven. "They noticed something was wrong with the turtle, called us, and kept an eye on the turtle from a short distance while we were on our way."

Enforcement issues related to sea turtles or any other protected resources can be reported to NOAA- NMFS Enforcement at 541-2727, or State of Hawaii Dept. of Land and Natural Resources Division of Conservation and Resource Enforcement at 587-0077.

Also, check out www.turtles.org for more great sea turtle information.

Turtle trivia

Spotted a stranded turtle or other marine life

- Note what might be wrong with it, and call the turtle stranded line at 983-5730 on Oahu.
- For other stranded Marine Mammals in Hawaii call (888) 256-9840.
- Check the phone book for any other animals that may strand from the ocean (Sea Life Park may take sea birds, etc.).

How can you help reduce the chance?

- Enjoy sea turtles from a distance.
- Do not attempt to disturb their natural behavior or bother them.
- Take care and learn about the ocean in general, and how to preserve it as a resource so that it, and all that it supports, remain healthy.
- Discard fishing line properly, do not throw into water.